

Memorandum for:

This memorandum was written by [] to provide background and analysis for inter-agency policy recommendations on the topic. The author coordinated the assessment with DDO/EUR, Chief/EURA, and NIO Europe; he also attended an inter-agency meeting on the subject, at which copies of the paper were distributed.

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Central Intelligence Agency



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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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West Germany: Concerns over VE-Day Celebrations

Summary

During Chancellor Kohl's US visit in November, State Department officials noted the strong emphasis he placed on West German sensitivities regarding the coming 40th anniversary of VE-Day. The West German press echoed those concerns in the following weeks. The depth of feeling expressed on this issue, at a time when West Germans appear to be extremely sensitive to their lack of a national identity and when US-USSR relations appear to be improving, suggests US officials will have a difficult time avoiding offending the sensibilities of this important NATO ally. In contrast, East Berlin, although it has concerns of its own, clearly poses less of a problem for Soviet leaders. [redacted]

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] EURA/WE/GN with contributions by [redacted] EURA/EE and [redacted] SOVA. Questions can be directed to Chief, Western Europe Division [redacted]

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Introduction

The 40th anniversary of the Allied victory over Nazi Germany comes at a particularly inopportune time for the West Germans, and possibly, therefore, for Bonn's Western allies as well. The Kohl government, in statements echoed by the press, worries that the commemoration of VE-Day this spring will stress Germany's military defeat and responsibility for the horrors inflicted on much of Europe. Government leaders fear such themes will alienate the West German people at a time when a new generation feels less responsibility for the mistakes of the past and expresses support for a more assertive pursuit of "German interests." The Kohl government instead has advanced proposals for joint commemorative services that focus on the beginning of German democracy and the readmission of the German people into the family of Western nations -- important themes to a government that has worked to cement the country's ties to NATO. [redacted]

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What the Kohl Government Wants to Avoid

Foremost among West German concerns is that Moscow will use the occasion to gloat over the triumphs of the Red Army and to belabor the "revanchist" theme that last year became a standard Soviet commentary on West Germany's foreign policy. VE-Day commemorations will, in fact, give Moscow additional opportunities to link current West German governments and policies with those of Nazi Germany, and West German concern is probably well-founded. The Soviet and East German press have clearly indicated that the USSR intends to play the anniversary to the hilt, and Moscow has continued its strident criticism of alleged West German revanchism despite recent improvements in the US-Soviet dialogue. These attacks, along with Moscow's heavy-handed efforts to cut back on West German relations with Eastern Europe, were clear expressions of concern over Bonn's role in NATO's INF deployments, the lifting of Western European Union restrictions on West German armament production, and various remarks by West German and US officials perceived as questioning the postwar arrangements in Europe. [redacted]

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Justification for renewal of the Warsaw Pact Treaty, which will occur along with the anniversary this spring, will further inspire the Soviets to raise the specter of the West German bogeyman. When the recently postponed Warsaw Pact summit is finally held, Moscow almost certainly will use the image of a renewed West German threat to lobby its East European partners for improved Pact unity. More importantly for Bonn, however, would be the obvious hope of Moscow to isolate the West Germans in Western Europe by recalling the horrors of the past. These factors probably explain why Kohl, according to press reports, objects to a joint USSR-US celebration in which Washington might appear to be endorsing Moscow's slanted view of German developments. [redacted]

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The West Germans also hope to avoid a repetition of last year's D-Day celebrations in Normandy, from which they were excluded. Because Chancellor Kohl had expressed interest in participating, some of the West German press portrayed his exclusion as a slight to the Chancellor in particular and the country as a whole. Both the Chancellor and his countrymen appreciated the belated gesture of French President Mitterrand, who later joined hands with Kohl at Verdun as a sign of present brotherhood in the face of past enmity. The West German press has also approvingly noted Mitterrand's recent remark that "the French Republic will not participate in anything that would wound the souls or hearts of our German friends." [redacted]

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Lack of West German participation probably would reinforce just those themes Bonn would like to avoid: Germany's military defeat and the country's collective guilt for the suffering the war caused. Few West Germans deny the guilt of Nazi Germany, but few also see the purpose of invoking those crimes forty years later as the major focus of celebrations commemorating the war's end. The Kohl government fears that such a focus would serve to alienate the West Germans from their European neighbors by emphasizing the concept of the Germans' "collective guilt" and by isolating the German experience as a separate and exclusively negative part of European history. [redacted]

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This probably explains as well West German sensitivities regarding plans reported in the press that President Reagan is considering a visit to the former concentration camp at Dachau. Again, the West Germans do not seek to deny that crimes were committed in their name at these camps; indeed, Kohl himself plans to speak at Bergen-Belsen in the weeks prior to VE-Day. Yet, West German journalists have speculated that a proposed visit to Dachau would only serve US domestic political considerations. More important to the Kohl government, however, is the concern that if the sole event the US President attends in West Germany is a service at a former concentration camp, it would reinforce precisely those themes the West Germans hope to play down. [redacted]

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What the Kohl Government Would Like to Celebrate

The West Germans would prefer that VE-Day commemorations herald a beginning rather than an end. In West German history books, 8 May represents a "Zero Hour" (Stunde Null) in German history: the end of a dictatorship and the beginning of a democracy. This has permitted the reintegration of the Germans (or part of them, at least) into the family of free and democratic Western nations. [redacted]

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This perspective is why Bonn has stressed its desire to participate in commemorations with the Western allies. Joint celebrations will serve, in West German eyes, to express the country's membership in and common bond with the other countries of Western Europe. In the words of one government spokesman, "The most important thing is that one should think of the young German generation -- that they should be proud of their heritage and made to feel at home in this Alliance." This probably explains, in part, Kohl's desire to host the Economic Summit in Bonn in early May, rather than a month later, as well as his wish for a US Presidential visit to the country in the days following the summit. Other West German plans call for an ecumenical service at Cologne's Cathedral to honor all war dead and the victims of the Nazi dictatorship, and to pray for peace, as well as a Bundestag address by President von Weizsaecker. [redacted]

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[redacted] West German leaders sincerely wish to prevent VE-Day commemorations from taking an anti-German tone, one that could alienate the West German public from its former enemies and current allies. The possibility that this will occur is greater at a time when numerous observers have noted a growing assertiveness in West Germany, as the country struggles to find a national identity and when the West Germans remain sensitive to slights -- intended or not -- to their place in Europe. Harping on negative aspects of the German past or glorifying a former military alliance directed against the Germans when the nation is currently divided and still enjoys only limited sovereignty could reinforce pressures for an even more determined pursuit of "German interests" within Europe and NATO, or, worse, strengthen the hand of advocates of West German neutrality. [redacted]

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Ideally, the West Germans would like to point to 8 May as marking the end of dictatorial rule only in the western zones. Yet, in our opinion, Bonn does not wish to aggravate current East-West tensions by focusing on this theme this spring. Instead, West German officials probably hope to avoid meeting their Soviet counterparts on 8 May, and we have seen no plans on the part of the government to celebrate VE-Day with Soviet representatives. [redacted]

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The Social Democrats have been willing to consider commemorative ceremonies with representatives from the East, none of them exclusively Soviet, however, in order to emphasize the need for reconciliation between former enemies and to reduce East-West tensions. Most attention has been given to a proposal by party business manager Peter Glotz for a meeting in Nuremberg in May of representatives from cities destroyed in the war -- principally Minsk, Dresden, Lidice, Oradour, Coventry, and Cologne -- as well as Auschwitz. Such a meeting would focus on the suffering caused by the war to all European peoples. Moscow reportedly reacted favorably to the idea, and said Soviet representatives would attend. [redacted]

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If anything, the Social Democrats are even more adamant than their Christian Democratic counterparts that VE-Day not become an occasion to celebrate German defeat and responsibility. Persecuted themselves by the Nazis, older SPD members are particularly sensitive to the notion of "collective guilt" that many fear will be a major theme of the VE-Day celebrations. In their eyes, Germans also have something to celebrate on 8 May, and there do exist positive elements in the German past worth commemorating. The SPD also plans to emphasize the idea of an end to dictatorship and a new beginning for Germany. In the words of party chairman and former exile Willy Brandt, "I also represent Germany. I was not defeated. Nazi Germany was defeated . . . As someone who was himself expatriated by Hitler, I feel that this is not a day on which Germans should passively endure the reminiscences of others." [redacted]

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Indeed, Social Democratic views clearly are not much different from those of the Kohl government. One press report noted that Chancellor Kohl has invited Brandt and SPD parliamentary leader Hans-Jochen Vogel to a meeting to discuss West German plans to commemorate 8 May. [redacted]

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East German Concerns

East Berlin to our knowledge plans no major observances of its own and is unlikely to participate in multilateral events except as an adjunct to the Soviets. East Berlin is just as anxious as Bonn that commemoration of the defeat in 1945 not provoke an unseemly domestic reaction. The East German regime is compelled, however, to support the celebrations of its Soviet ally. This support is already apparent in extensive praise of the country's "liberation" by the Red Army, with little mention of the role of the other wartime Allies except in connection with the destruction of cities such as Dresden. [redacted]

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East Berlin is particularly sensitive to any suggestion that it shares responsibility for the Nazi past. The regime has consistently emphasized its continuity with German resistance to Hitler, and has criticized the alleged failure of West Germany to denazify and democratize its society. This sensitivity will reinforce the East Germans' desire to avoid any multilateral observances of the events of 1945 except as necessary to fulfill its obligations to Moscow. East Berlin may also intensify anti-West German propaganda in response to observances elsewhere it finds too soft on the Nazi legacy. We believe, however, that the East Germans would want to avoid comments harsh enough to precipitate further setbacks in intra-German relations. [redacted]

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East German concerns over the observances of VE-Day and other events, then, are unlikely to affect US planning directly because East Berlin and Washington are unlikely to be involved in the same proceedings. East German reactions still could impinge on bilateral relations with Washington, for instance, through East German criticism of Western observances. [redacted]

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